

Linda Clair
Seven-day Meditation Retreat
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Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 5a – Wednesday morning discussion session

Linda: How are you V.?

Question: That last hour was a struggle – the body is pretty stretched, and I'm sick of counting. I feel like I'm on a Sesame Street binge. (Laughter) And if I don't (count), or even if I do, I get sucked up in the thought anyway. It's been varied. A lot of energy again.

Linda: Are you sleeping?

Question: Yes. Sleeping at night, sleeping at lunch, even sometimes sleeping between breakfast and 9:30 sit. (Laughter) I came in quite tired, off a night shift and a pretty hectic week trying to get something imploded. It's funny because the last few retreats I haven't really had any resistance coming in. This time, I thought, "Oh it's back again," then the first night in bed I had the biggest smile on my face, just so happy to be here. So maybe it's just tiredness or too much going on.

Linda: Are you still really happy to be here? (Yes) Maybe not quite as happy. 😊 (Laughter)

Question: I don't question it as much. I just sort of do it and try not to think about it too much.

Linda: Do it, get it over with. 😊

Question: I don't know. I guess I just want to do what you say, and things come true. And something draws me back, and I have very joyous moments. That energy is really interesting. At times it's really intense and it can really surge, but it's quite loving as well. I was looking at it a bit closer and the way it moves. It's also thorough, it's like no stone left unturned. It seems to want to reach into every corner, every crevice. It's quite interesting.

Linda: And it has to, it needs to. Then most of the residual stuff – in my experience – like A. was saying the other day, worldly experiences take care of that. Once you've gone through the main stuff, there's still a bit of residual stuff there. What takes care of that mainly is just being in the world, life, stuff – seeing what triggers me and let it go.

Question: That's probably where I value the practice the most. I see in places like work where suddenly I can handle a situation differently. In the last year if something like a bird flies overhead really quickly, now I see it with incredible detail. It's like when you have an accident and the adrenaline kicks in. I've been in a couple of car accidents – everything kind of slows down just prior to the impact. You see every detail. That never used to happen. Is that an example of consciousness speeding up?

Linda: Yes. Even though everything slows down – I haven't been in a car accident like that... Is that what happens?

Question: Yes, it's flight or fright. It's what adrenalin does. It seems to slow time down. It's quite surreal.

Linda: It is a bit like that. It's not like you feel that adrenalin all the time but you're on that high alert but at ease with it; on the edge all the time. And you're aware of that life-death thing. You never take anything for granted because you really don't know. It's not like you're thinking about it but you're just on edge. You wouldn't have been thinking about it before the accident. Was there fear there?

Question: Maybe shock, in the accident situation. I think it allows you time and space for action. Or you can't do anything, just watch it unfold. With the bird example, there's no fear in that. It darts over and it's like, "Wow, I really saw the detail in that," and marvel at how that was even possible.

Linda: Yes, you notice that kind of stuff much more when you're not busy thinking about stuff. And the same sitting here, there's all these bird sounds, particularly in the morning: the kookaburra, the rain. I don't look for meaning in it and I don't say to myself, "Isn't that beautiful." You just hear it. You hear all this stuff and see all this stuff that you don't when you're busy preparing for things and thinking about what's just happen and what might happen. But that edge – that's how your life becomes – that edginess is there all the time. You get used to edginess; in a way you never get used to it but it just becomes the state, this edge, where anything can happen. It's quite exciting really.

Question: Is it like an awareness or preparedness for anything as well?

Linda: I don't know if preparedness is the right word. It's just an awareness that anything could happen, an openness to anything happening. And when you're aware of that, that becomes quite exciting. Before it was, "Oh, anything could happen. It could be terrible." Instead it's, "Ah, anything could happen!" and you just don't know. And you realise you don't know and you've never known, you just thought that you did. So you're completely open to everything.

Question: I get a bit of a sense of that in my day-do-day life in places like work which is good practice ground. Like letting go of control and seeing what happens. Quite often it works out better than I could have imagined. I just go with it. So I'm still glad to be here.

Question: Going on what V. was saying about this intensity and thoroughness, a big grin came across my face when he said that because that's been exactly my experience in wild and unexpected ways. In that last sit – and it's the first time I've sat on a chair for a couple of sessions – it's like I heard the fireplace and the whole building creaking, groaning, and cracking as the sun was rising towards mid-day. I felt like that was my body. I just had to sit with no attachment – that's what the energy was doing to my body – and let it unfold. But the breath and the fireplace are always there.

Linda: No, it's not always there. One day it won't be there. (Laughter)

Question: Yes, one day it won't. Because it's here right now – deep gratitude. I remember what you were saying about pure intelligence, and that sometimes it can seem a bit cold and other times a deep loving quality – maybe not a coldness but directness. And that's what I need in that moment. Then other times there's warmth and softness and this is what I need to yield to. It's funny that I experienced softness towards the end of the last session when I was sitting on my cushion. And then I thought maybe I should sit on the chair and be a bit softer with myself. The experiences when I sat on a chair was that all of a sudden I had to be very strict, because the body was out of the way and I was comfortable. It was really challenging.

Linda: Yes, it can be very challenging on a chair. And it's true, you have to be doubly alert because it is easier to get comfortable in your body.

Question: It reminds me of what A. was saying about the different parts of the egoic structure that can be or should be experienced by exposing yourself to different things. Like you said, the experiences of life should work a lot of this out. Also in retreat here, the experiment of sitting on the chair, or getting up or not getting up, or sitting a longer session or not, has been really valuable as well. And also the difficulty in discerning when I'm grasping comfort or listening to what needs to happen for the process to continue. Does that make sense?

Linda: Yes. That's good

Question: Yesterday you were talking to D. about putting in real effort in the counting, or being earnest in your effort, because the thoughts were not going to go away. The idea of the effort in meditation made the penny drop for me. I realised I've been a back-seat meditator. Because the counting is dry and because my breath often goes very quiet and I can barely perceive it so it's very hard to count in that case – I revert back to feeling being present, being in the body or hearing sounds. That all works well if the mind is quiet. But because there's no structure to this, as soon as the mind is busy, there's no chance. The idea of putting in the effort totally flipped that around. I feel like I'm in the driver's seat now.

Linda: That's good.

Question: It's good in the sense that I feel I'm really concentrating a lot more. I even feel my head is buzzing which is the wrong place.

Linda: No, it's not the wrong place. Nowhere is the wrong place to feel that. I still do at times – I have this retreat anyway, although I haven't for a while. But this retreat I have felt quite a bit of energy in the head. You will feel that at times so don't feel that's the wrong place. And when you do feel that, you've really got to work on being grounded so you don't get too carried away by it, because you can tend to go off into a spacey or even hyperventilate a bit if it's really strong. So you really need to come down here because the pressure in the head can at times be very, very intense. A lot happens in the brain, a lot happens. And you will at times feel it strongly. So you did feel like you were hyperventilating?

Question: Yes, from the breath being very quiet a lot of the time, I feel now it's very regimented. It's like it's being controlled. And that's why it works because there's more of a continuity between breaths that I can perceive. But it feels almost like a task. I'm used to that and it works well for me but it feels like focus, and I know it's something you often say that focus is the not-right idea or attitude.

Linda: No, but there's a slight difference when you're doing the counting – it's not focusing. And thoughts will probably come in between the numbers and that's fine. But you do have to put a bit more concentration on the counting to really stay with it. Also, with the breath, don't try and control it or keep it in a regimented rhythm. It will change. So particularly if you do get a lot of stuff in your head, accentuate the breath a bit more. Sometimes make it stronger, even what you feel is unnecessarily strong and deep, just to ride that wave of energy so that you can cope with what's happening because you will get a lot of energy in your body at times. The breath is a way of riding it without getting too disturbed by the whole thing. And then it will quiet down until it almost not there. You'll be okay for a while – the seas will be calm – and then suddenly it will come up again. That can happen quite a bit.

So don't try and keep it exactly the same – it will change. And allow it to change. Don't be scared of it changing and going with it. In that way, be as open and flexible as you can. But the thing that you said about effort is great, it's really good. There's this ingrained belief in most people that meditation shouldn't take effort, you shouldn't have to work, it's not a task, you should be still and enjoying it. Eventually that's what happens – it does become completely effortless and timeless – but leading up to that it takes a lot of effort for something to become effortless.

Once you get over that barrier of, "Oh, it shouldn't take this much effort," it's a big thing. Then you're prepared to put in that effort, and you will put in that extra bit of effort when it's needed. But then also sometimes come back a bit. And the mind will come in sometimes because you're just tired from making that effort. It will come in and you won't really have the energy to be able to do much with it. So you have to just tread water and do the best to be in your body because at times it will just take over again, but then come back. But when you're doing this you are weakening its grip on you, it's control over you. And you are taking the driver's seat which is where you need to be, not sitting in the back letting it take over and take you wherever it wants to go.

Question: It feels like it's opened a new door in my practice. But I think I still need to find or experiment with the sweet spot. Knowing that I need to put in effort gives me that resolve. I'm not consciously trying to regulate the breath. It just happens on its own because of the resolve. I think the sweet spot lies in between.

Linda: The sweet spot you'll feel after this. You'll keep looking for it during this and go, "Oh yes, I've got it now!" I did the same, "All right, this works. This is what's happening," and then it suddenly changes again. So you never really know where you stand. But you'll feel the effects of it afterwards and then you'll go, "Oh wow, yes!" And then you'll be even more prepared to put in more effort. It's not that you're going to necessarily feel great after this. You might for a while feel a bit stirred up. And then things will settle down and you'll go, "Wow, something has gone. I don't know what it is but there's something there." And that's what will bring you back to do this again, usually not what's happening during the actual retreat. It's much more deep-seated than that.

It takes time for your body, psyche, to assimilate the effects of something like this and to realise that something profound has happened. And you can't say what it is because usually it's something has dropped away – it's the absence of something, and you won't see it until a situation arises and you go, "Oh my god, it's okay. Something has happened." And it won't be necessarily what you might think you want to happen. It won't necessarily be these amazing, mysterious experiences. It will do something much, much deeper than that – something that you've been carrying around most of your life is suddenly not there and doesn't come back again.

Question: I found even the last few sits putting in more effort there was a lot less thinking which is really encouraging. It makes me want to put more effort. In a way it's harder but it's fine because it works.

Linda: Yes, strangely enough, the harder it is, the more satisfying it is when it does really start to kick in, the overdrive kicks in.

Question: I've been thinking over the last few days that I haven't spoken for a while on retreats. I hear the amazing questions and rich discussions. I'm here and I'm working and stuff's happening, but I don't retain what's happening. Things come up and they'll pass through. I feel it doesn't stick and I can't draw on it. It's like I'm trying to remember what's happened but it's kind of gone. I don't know if I need to make more effort to try to, not analyse but examine, or whether to let it go.

Linda: Let it go. If someone asks what happened last sit, I've got no idea at all. What happened yesterday, or what someone just said or what I said to them – I have no idea. When things aren't sticking, it's actually a sign that things are happening because you can't remember. Don't analyse things, don't try to remember everything. Everything you need will be taken in by your body.

The same with anything I'm saying or anyone else is saying. If you're really listening, usually you don't remember much or you might remember a few words. With me, I can occasionally remember a few words that people have said to me. And what teachers have said in the past is gone, more and more. But every now and again something comes up – often stuff that Barry Long had said, like never follow a dead teacher or dead master. 😊 And of course once he died, they did the opposite.

Don't try and remember, don't try and analyse. If you haven't got any questions, it's fine. If you've got nothing much to say, it's fine. It does make it a bit more lively if someone says something. The fact that it isn't sticking is a sign that things are going well.

Question: I notice it in daily life as well. Sometimes I feel I am losing my ability to hold information or relate things back. Things seem to pass really quickly.

Linda: Well, yes, you do lose your desire to retain information. And the natural state becomes, rather than trying to remember, you stop trying to remember everything. It doesn't mean you forget everything. Things come up and you do need to be more disciplined with things in daily life. But the more deeply you trust that whatever needs to happen will happen and whatever I need to remember I will, the more it all sort of clicks into place. You still need to be disciplined and right things down. But yes, it's part of the whole process, this lack of desire, because if you really want to retain it you can. But the desire to retain information goes more and more. But it doesn't mean you become non-functioning, which is what most people's fear is. In a way you become more efficient. For example, sitting somewhere thinking about a situation for half an hour before you actually take action. Instead, you just do it and get it out of the way and get it done.

So yes, it can be disconcerting at times but it is part of this.

Question: It feels very natural. I don't have resistance to it. It's like there's no possible way to change it. It's just good to ask and clarify that it's not something to be making an effort in that direction.

Linda: No, don't try to make an effort to try and retain things because that's just feeding the whole remembering, thinking process. And this does need to happen gradually. You trust more and more that you don't need to remember because that deep desire to think and remember is very, very deep and deeply ingrained. That happens from when we're very young children, that you have to remember this and that, "Memories are great." It's just continually fed into us. Before you know it there's so much going on in your head that you're not actually here feeling what you're supposed to be remembering. You're remembering something that happened a few seconds ago but you're never actually here. You see it happening in kids gradually, gradually.

There's not really a whole lot you can do about it except *this*. This is the best example you can give your children. But they have to go through what they need to go through. It's the same for everyone. But that trust in the not needing to think and remember happens very, very gradually. Eventually you see, "I'm not going to die if I don't think. It's all okay." Because that's the deep fear, that you're actually going to cease to exist. That "I" will cease to exist but the body will still be here.

But if there's this identification with the body as this is who I am, of course there's going to be a deep fear that's there all the time. Because the only thing you truly know is that this body someday is going to die and that's the end of me. So you're going to cling onto it or try and avoid the fact that you're in the body, using any way you can, and thinking is the most efficient way of avoiding being in the body. So it's not that we're trying to stop thinking. It's more than that, it's the desire to think that you need to get to, and that lies in your body. So just do everything as much as possible with your body, in your body.

And look closely at things when you're suddenly lost in thinking, when you're doing something or you think, "Oh, I need to think about this." Do you really need to think about what you're doing?